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SOME IMPLICIT PRESUPPOSITIONS OF TYPICAL WRITINGS
IN THE FIELD OF AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study made of some of the implicit presuppositions contained in the following materials: The Federalist, papers 10 and 51 by Madison, selections from de Tocqueville's Democracy in America; Emerson's "The American Scholar"; Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"; "Washington as Commander in Chief" in Bancroft's History of the United States; and "A Small Group of Men Hold in their hands the Business of this Country," a Senate speech by Robert M. LaFollette. Fifteen students at the Claremont Graduate School, who had taken a course in which these materials were studied, rated them on seven scales, or "dimensions," each of which represents one of a contrasting pair of implicit presuppositions which we have identified and defined. At 19 of the 42 choice points at which decisions had to be made (six selections on seven dimensions) the ratings proved to be significant at $p < .05$ level. These results thus expand the "scope" of our set of implicit presuppositions to include new materials not previously investigated. In short, it has been shown that readers who are guided by our definitions are able to agree on some of the implicit assumptions contained in a representative sample of writings in the field of American intellectual history.

SOME IMPLICIT PRESUPPOSITIONS OF TYPICAL WRITINGS
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This Working Paper reports another in the series of studies we are making of the ways in which cultural products of all kinds -- novels, poems, paintings, philosophical and psychological theories, for instance -- are characterized by differing implicit presuppositions. We have identified, defined, and tested a set of eleven contrasting pairs of such presuppositions. The purpose of this series of studies was to evaluate these dimensions for scope. That is, we have been evaluating the ability of readers to find the presuppositions, as we have defined them, in a wide variety of cultural products.

METHOD

In the present study the materials used were The Federalist, papers 10 and 51 by Madison; selections from de Tocqueville's Democracy in America; Emerson's "The American Scholar"; Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"; "Washington as Commander in Chief" in Bancroft's History of the United States, and "A Small Group of Men Hold in Their Hands the Business of this Country," a 1908 speech by Robert M. LaFollette in the U.S. Senate. These six were chosen for us

by Professor Robert Dawidoff from a longer list of readings used by him in his course, "Themes in American Intellectual History," at the Claremont Graduate School, and we are much indebted to Professor Dawidoff for his assistance and support. The raters, all students in his course, were adults enrolled in the Executive Management Program at the Graduate School. The test materials were handed out to the students at the end of the last day of class, as a "take home," volunteer exercise. In all, 15 students returned the test.

As in the studies described in other Working Papers, the students were provided with a number of rating scales, each containing the definitions of a contrasting pair of implicit presuppositions. The rating scales used in this study differed in one respect from the rating scales used in other studies. The scales in this study contained a "zero," which the raters were instructed to use if they thought the material they were rating was evenly balanced with respect to the two presuppositions defined on that rating scale. (See Figure 1 for a sample rating sheet.) In the present study the materials were rated on only seven of the eleven dimensions of presupposition which we have identified. The definitions of these seven contrasting pairs of presuppositions are given in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

This study differed in two more respects, both important, from the other studies we are reporting. First, in those studies the materials rated -- for instance, the four letters from the correspondence columns of Science, reported in Working Paper No. 354,

were short; the raters could easily read them in their entirety in the process of doing the ratings. With the much longer and more varied materials of the present study, the students had to make judgments that were based on their memory of materials read during the whole semester. Second, in those earlier studies we had ourselves selected the materials we had used, and we had chosen them in order to test hypotheses we had formulated. In the present study we were not sufficiently familiar with the particular readings selected by Professor Dawidoff to predict the implicit presuppositions they contained. We were simply interested in learning what presuppositions readers familiar with these selections would find in them.

RESULTS

Since we treat the dimensions as ordinal scales, we will not use means, standard deviations, and tests of significance that require interval scales. For our first analysis the ratings were trichotomized as follows: above the middle (toward the A pole, including ratings A through E), at the middle (at 0), or below the middle (toward the Z pole, including ratings V through Z). Table 2 presents the number of students whose ratings were categorized A-E, 0, or V-Z for each of the six papers for each of the seven dimensions.

[Table 2 about here]

Of the 42 decision points (6 papers on 7 dimensions), 19 showed a statistically significant ($p < .05$) proportion of the ratings as either above or below the center. Of these there was consensus on

four of the seven dimensions (as indicated by a concentration of ratings at one or the other of the two poles of each dimension) for two of the selections -- de Tocqueville's "Democracy" and Emerson's "Scholar." There was consensus on three of the seven dimensions for two of the selections -- Madison's "Federalist" and Bancroft's "Washington." There was consensus on two of the dimensions for Melville's "Bartleby" and on one of the dimensions for LaFollette's "Small Group."

Inasmuch as these results have been obtained in what is only a preliminary study (moreover one in which only a very small number of subjects were used), it might be thought desirable to protect ourselves against the possibility of Type I Errors (in which a "true" hypothesis is rejected) by requiring a less stringent level of significance. Table 3 shows that 32 of the 42 comparisons reach the $p < .25$ level, and, moreover that D-1, D-7 and D-10 are significant in all comparisons. Since we want to be cautious in our interpretation of the results we shall confine ourselves to comparisons that are significant at $p < .05$, but the results obtained by using the more relaxed criterion should be worth testing in future studies.

[Table 3 about here]

We also computed the medians and the first and third quartiles for all decision points at which the results are significant (at $p < .05$). These are displayed in Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

The medians show how far apart the central tendencies of the distributions of implicit presuppositions of any two selections were perceived to be on any given dimension. For instance, the students perceived the implicit presupposition of Federalist Papers 10 and 51 and those of de Tocqueville's Democracy in America as markedly different on D-3 and D-7; and they perceived the implicit presuppositions of Emerson's "American Scholar" and Bancroft's "Washington" as identical on D-5.

The first and third quartiles show the amount of dispersion of the ratings on a given dimension. Reference to Table 4 will show that the clustering around the medians is very marked; in most cases the first and third quartiles are only one interval (sometimes less) apart. In other words, most students' assessments of most selections on most dimensions were very similar.

But why were the ratings of some selections on some dimensions more dispersed than others? Why, for instance, were the results for the Federalist papers on D-7 (range from 0 to Z) and LaFollette's Senate speech on D-4 (range from 0 to Y) more ambiguous than the results for Emerson's "American Scholar"? And, looking at the results by dimensions instead of by selections, why were the results for D-6, for which only one selection was significant, more ambiguous than those for D-7 and D-10, for which four of the six selections were significant? In a word, why were some of the decision points random? Since 19 of the 42 choice points were significant at $p < .05$, when only approximately two of the 42 would have been expected by chance, it is fair to conclude that the raters understood our definitions and

could apply them to the materials they were asked to rate. Why, then, did they not agree at all the decision points?

Several possible explanations suggest themselves. Probably the students had spent more time on, and so were more familiar with, some of the selections than others. Probably, too, since the test was long, some students became fatigued or lost interest. It is a fact that fewer students rated LaFollette's speech, the last one on the test, than rated any other selection. Possibly, too, quite apart from differences in the time spent on the various selections, some selections were more difficult than others. The difference between the results for the Emerson selection (four of seven dimensions significant) and the Melville selection (two dimensions significant) may reflect the fact that the students found Melville's short story more "obscure" than Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa Address.

But the fact that some selections were random for some dimensions may not reflect merely characteristics of the raters; they may also reflect characteristics of the materials being rated. It may be the case that some of the selections are not clearly characterized by some of the presuppositions listed. There is certainly no apriori reason why every cultural product whatever should be characterized by the full set of presuppositions. It is quite possible that different kinds of materials may reflect differing combinations of implicit presuppositions.

This brings us to a final question. Are there a limited number of different patterns of implicit presuppositions that recur in many different cultural products? If so, how many such patterns are

there, and do certain patterns tend to predominate in different societies at different periods? These are questions which we cannot yet answer. But the method we have used in this and other tests help answer such questions, i.e., help verify (or falsify) hypotheses concerning the possible existence, range, and persistence over time of configurations of implicit presuppositions. Based on findings in other tests¹ we have tentatively defined two patterns, which we call the N- and G-configurations. The contrasting presuppositions associated with these (possible) patterns are given in Table 5.

[Table 5 about here]

We can ask to what extent the six selections used in this study conform either to the N- or to the G-configuration. The results are displayed in Table 6.

[Table 6 about here]

It will be seen that the presuppositions of de Tocqueville's Democracy in America, as the students perceived it, conforms to the N-configuration for all significant decision points (4 of 4 are N), and that the presuppositions of Emerson's "The American Scholar" conforms fairly closely to the G-configuration (3 of the 3 significant decision points are G). The results for the other four selections are less determinate, partly because we have fewer significant decision points for them. If we were to increase the number of significant comparisons (by relaxing the requirement for significance to $p < .25$) the results would be much more consistent with the presence of

patterns. See Table 7.

[Table 7 about here]

Although, as we stated at the outset, we are not sufficiently acquainted with the particular selections used in this test to have been able to predict how they would be rated, we are familiar with other writings by some of these authors. Most readers of Madison and de Tocqueville, and of Emerson and Melville, would agree, we think, that there are more "family resemblances" (to use an expression of Wittgenstein's) between Madison and de Tocqueville than between either of these writers and either Emerson or Melville. The dimensions we have defined provide a set of indices for calling attention to, and specifying, family traits which, without such indices, might escape notice altogether or else simply be lumped together in a general "look alike" or "look different." The results summarized in Table 6, supplemented by those in Table 7, tend to confirm our initial impressions regarding these four authors. Thus Emerson's "Scholar" and Melville's "Bartleby" share a number of family traits (they differ in but one trait). The family resemblance between Madison's "Federalist" and de Tocqueville's "Democracy" is less close, but their difference on D-7 may result from the students' interpretation of "participation" as "advocacy" rather than as a cognitive mode (empathetic understanding, as opposed to cognitive neutrality). If that is indeed the case the similarity between the "Federalist" and "Democracy" would be greater, and the former would conform more closely to the N-configuration.

CONCLUSIONS

So far, so good; but in all truth not very far. The data obtained in this study do not take us very far toward testing the hypothesis that implicit presuppositions fall into recurring patterns. On the one hand, what look like two distinguishable configurations may not survive further study. On the other hand, what look like deviations from the N- and G-configurations may not be deviations at all but rather instantiations of other configurations.

Examination of these and other possibilities lies ahead in the future. Meanwhile, the limited objective set for this particular test has been achieved. The scope of our definitions has been expanded to include a new set of materials, not previously studied. It has been shown that readers who are guided by our definitions are able to agree on some of the implicit presuppositions contained in a number of writings on in the field of American intellectual history.

FOOTNOTES

1. For instance, a study of essays by B. F. Skinner and Carl Rogers, which will be reported in another Working Paper.

FIGURE 1

A SAMPLE RATING SHEET

D-1

Emphasis primarily on the inner life of the subject -- on mood, feeling, attitude, belief, desire.

A _____

B _____

C _____

D _____

E _____

O (equal) _____

V _____

W _____

X _____

Y _____

Z _____

Emphasis primarily on external aspects of the subject -- such as social and economic status, observable behavior, interactions with others, external appearance.

TABLE 1

DEFINITIONS OF THE DIMENSIONS OF IMPLICIT
PRESUPPOSITION USED IN THIS STUDY

DIMENSION 1*

- one end - Emphasis on external aspects of the subject - for example, on social or economic status, external appearance, observable behavior, interactions with others which depend upon relative status, role or position.
- other end - Emphasis on the inner life of the subject - for example, on mood, feeling, attitude, belief, desire, interactions with others which arise from personal or emotional concern.

DIMENSION 3

- one end - Emphasis on parts or elements of a whole, rather than on the whole itself. These parts are (or may be considered) independent of other parts. Parts themselves may be analyzed into constituent parts.
- other end - Emphasis on the whole, rather than on parts. The parts themselves may not be clearly distinguished; if they are, relations among them are emphasized, not their independence.

DIMENSION 4

- one end - Emphasis on states of rest or of stable equilibrium.
- other end - Emphasis on change, motion or transitional states.

DIMENSION 5

- one end - Emphasis on self-determination in the choices that a person makes that affect his/her own life; on the individual's power to change the course of events - a power that is attributable to qualities of the individual himself/herself.
- other end - Emphasis on the powerlessness of the individual to make the choices that affect his/her life; on the individual's lack of power to change the course of events - a lack of power that may be attributable either to qualities of the individual himself/herself, or to outer circumstances, or to both.

*The numbers assigned to dimensions identify them in our full list of eleven. Only seven were used in this study.

DIMENSION 6

- one end - Emphasis on the general, rather than on the particular; on what holds true for many individuals or for many cases; on what is not tied down to a particular person, place or date.
- other end - Emphasis on what is specific or particular; on the unique characteristics of some person, place or date.

DIMENSION 7

- one end - Emphasis on the point of view of an observer, of one who is uninvolved in, detached from, the subject matter.
- other end - Emphasis on the point of view of a participant, of one who feels involved in or concerned (positively or negatively) with the subject matter.

DIMENSION 10

- one end - Emphasis on the position that the world seems fundamentally simple.
- other end - Emphasis on the position that the world seems fundamentally complex.

TABLE 2

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RATINGS FOR EACH SELECTION ON THE SEVEN DIMENSIONS

	D-1		D-3		D-4		D-5		D-6		D-7		D-10	
	Inner	Outer	Unity	Diversity	Static	Dynamic	Self-Determination	Powerless	Abstract	Concrete	Observer	Participant	Simple	Complex
	0		0		0		0		0		0		0	
Madison's "Federalist"	4	- 11	14	- 1	5	1 9	9 4 2	5	1 9	2	3 10	13	- 2	
de Tocqueville's "Democracy"	0	3 10	2	2 10	4	- 10	4 1 9	4	2 8	13	- 1	12	- 2	
Emerson's "Scholar"	13	- 1	8	3 3	2	1 11	13	- 1	10	2 3	2	1 11	3	- 11
Melville's "Bartleby"	10	- 4	7	1 6	4	- 10	1	- 13	7	4 3	3	- 11	1	- 13
Bancroft's "Washington"	8	2 2	9	1 2	6	1 5	11	1 0	3	- 9	2	1 2	12	- 0
LaFollette's "Small Group"	1	- 10	6	- 5	1	2 8	6	- 5	0	1 10	2	1 8	8	- 3

For each dimension the left hand column includes ratings from A to E and the right hand column includes ratings from V to Z. (Also see Figure 1 and Table 1.)

In the 0 column, "-" indicates that there were no such ratings.

Underlining of numbers (e.g., 0) indicates that this split is significant at $p < .05$ two tail by sign test (Marascuilo, L.A., 1971. *Statistical Methods for Behavioral Science Research*. McGraw-Hill, p. 97.)

N varies because not all subjects rated all works on all dimensions.

TABLE 3

SIGNIFICANCE LEVELS AT $p < .25$, $p < .10$ and $p < .05$

	D-1	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6	D-7	D-10
"Federalist"	.25	<u>.05</u>		.25		<u>.05</u>	<u>.05</u>
"Democracy"	<u>.05</u>	<u>.05</u>	.25			<u>.05</u>	<u>.05</u>
"Scholar"	<u>.05</u>		<u>.05</u>	<u>.05</u>	.10	<u>.05</u>	.10
"Bartleby"	.25		.25	<u>.05</u>		.10	<u>.05</u>
"Washington"	.25	.10		<u>.05</u>	.25	<u>.05</u>	<u>.05</u>
"Small Group"	<u>.05</u>		<u>.05</u>		<u>.05</u>	.25	.25

TABLE 4

MEDIAN AND FIRST AND THIRD QUANTILES FOR ALL SIGNIFICANT CASES ($p < .05$)

		D-1	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6	D-7	D-10
Madison's "Federalist"	median		C				Y	B
	1st and 3rd quartiles		B-D				O-Z	B-D
de Tocqueville's "Democracy"	median	Z	W				B	C
	1st and 3rd quartiles	V-Z	O-X				A-C	B-D
Emerson's "Scholar"	median	B		W	B		Y	
	1st and 3rd quartiles	A-B		V-Y	A-B		W-Z	
Melville's "Bartleby"	median				Y			Z
	1st and 3rd quartiles				Y-Z			X-Z
Bancroft's "Washington"	median				B		C	B
	1st and 3rd quartiles				A-B		B-O	A-C
LaFollette's "Small Group"	median	Y		X		Y		
	1st and 3rd quartiles	X-Z		O-Y		W-Y		

The alphabetical values correspond with the letters on the scales on which the subjects made their ratings. See Figure 1.

TABLE 5

















TWO POSSIBLE CONFIGURATIONS OF PRESUPPOSITIONS

	D-1	D-3	D-4	D-6	D-7	D-10
N	outer	diversity	static	abstract	observer	simple
G	inner	unity	dynamic	concrete	participant	complex

Analyses from other studies suggest that the N- and G-configuration are indeterminate for D-5. It is therefore not included in this table.

TABLE 6

RESULTS FOR N- AND G-CONFIGURATIONS
($p < .05$)

	D-1	D-3	D-4	D-6	D-7	D-10	Pattern
"Federalist"							?
"Democracy"							N
"Scholar"							G
"Bartleby"							?
"Washington"							?
"Small Group"							?





























Conforms to N-configuration



Conforms to G-configuration



TABLE 7
RESULTS FOR N- AND G-CONFIGURATIONS
($p < .25$)

	D-1	D-3	D-4	D-6	D-7	D-10	Pattern
"Federalist"							?
"Democracy"							N?
"Scholar"							G?
"Bartleby"							G
"Washington"							G?
"Small Group"							G?

Conforms to N-Configuration



Conforms to G-Configuration

